



The Nebraska Framework For School Improvement

A Guide

To Continuous Improvement

In Nebraska Schools

Nebraska Department of Education

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Additional resources may be accessed on the
Nebraska Department of Education website at:

www.nde.state.ne/ciptoolkit

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NEBRASKA MODEL FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



THINKING ABOUT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Why Is It Important?

Those who work in schools are entrusted with society's most precious possessions, its young. Teachers, administrators, bus drivers, counselors, board members, and cooks say to parents, "Send your children to us. We will be responsible for seeing that they learn and perform as you and we have jointly determined they should. We pledge to treat your children fairly, to believe in them, to welcome them and nurture them in a safe and secure environment. To achieve those ends, we promise to do our best, and we will challenge your children to do the same. We will be responsible for using wisely the resources you provide us to achieve those purposes. Furthermore, we pledge to be accountable to you, to report frequently on your children's progress and on our efforts to carry out your trust." Some may question the time and effort required by the school improvement process, arguing that it would be better if we simply allowed teachers to do that for which they have been trained. Quite frankly, school improvement is really about that, because what teachers do is evaluate, prescribe, implement, and assess. School improvement supports those functions, formalizes them, and encourages a coordinated, focused school-wide approach to carry them out. School improvement is one significant way through which those who work in schools can carry out society's trust and demonstrate that this trust is well placed.

We all keep working at school improvement, adjusting, revising, tweaking – striving to get it right. Whether we ever get it exactly "right" is unlikely, but about one thing there is no doubt: it is the right thing to do. Educators cannot be content with the status quo when they focus on improving student learning for all.

This version of the *Frameworks* advises school staff as they design and implement improvement processes for their systems. It provides, in handbook form, the continuous process described in the Nebraska Department of Education Improvement Process toolkit found at <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ciptoolkit>. We invite your comments and suggestions for future editions.

THE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT MODEL GUIDING AND ALIGNING IMPROVEMENT IN NEBRASKA SCHOOLS

Aligning Improvement Plans and Activities

The Nebraska model for continuous improvement is intended to assist Nebraska schools in aligning and coordinating the various school improvement initiatives that may be in progress in each district. These may include for example, Improving Learning for Children with Disabilities (ILCD), Title I Improvement Plans, technology plans, curriculum development activities, and plans for other local, state, or federal programs. Schools are encouraged to merge or align their various plans and goals so that local improvement activities will be mutually supportive and consistently aimed toward achieving school improvement goals. Therefore, it is crucial that representatives of special projects and programs be frequent participants in school improvement planning.

In addition, local standards, curriculum, assessment, and professional development should be developed and implemented through the involvement of all staff members to provide quality learning experiences for all students and to provide a solid foundation for developing and implementing school improvement plans. Ongoing committees for curriculum, assessment, and professional development should, therefore, communicate frequently with the School Improvement Steering Committee to assure that these important activities are indeed mutually supportive.

Research has identified four areas critical to high performance schools. These are:

- Curriculum alignment
- Appropriate instructional strategies
- Family and community engagement
- Assuring equity and addressing diversity

Therefore, the Nebraska Toolkit for school improvement (www.nde.state.ne.us/ciptoolkit) provides resources in each of these areas. School improvement committees are encouraged to access these resources throughout the development and implementation of school improvement plans.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The instructional program should be based on an agreed-upon written curriculum for all subjects in all grades. This should guide teachers in instructional planning and help assure that the district's curriculum is comprehensive, up-to-date, and aligned across content areas. The following components in curriculum development should be considered in school improvement planning:

- Chairpersons for curriculum committees may also be leaders in school improvement committees or coordinators with leaders of goal committees.
- Curriculum committees should coordinate long-range curriculum review, develop and clarify standards and local expectations, assure curriculum alignment with standards, and help monitor progress on local improvement goals.
- All staff members should participate routinely in discussion of their respective curriculum areas. This will serve as a source of information in the school improvement process. As ownership of curriculum develops, school improvement goals common to all staff can become a focused priority.

ASSESSMENT PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The local assessment plan should guide the school in developing and implementing assessment processes. School leaders should establish an assessment committee to coordinate assessment implementation by all staff and help staff develop assessment literacy and skill in the use of data for guiding instruction, improving learning and also for school improvement.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is crucial that professional development be connected with the school improvement process. This can include whole staff activities, local learning teams, individual work, and other related activities. A professional development coordinating committee or a combination of other local committees or the School Improvement Steering Committee may be responsible for the development of this plan.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEADERSHIP

The Leadership Role - Who and What:

The district administrative team and an appointed Steering Committee (sometimes called the Leadership Team, School Improvement Team or Continuous Improvement Team) have primary responsibility for leading, coordinating, and monitoring the school improvement process. This includes the following duties:

- Reviewing previous school improvement activities
- Providing orientation/training/staff development for all staff
- Establishing and communicating timelines to all staff
- Coordinating school or district initiatives for continuous improvement
- Appointing and assisting committees
- Monitoring progress
- And – establishing, through attitude and deed, a positive climate

Step 1: Establish a Steering Committee for the Continuous Improvement Process

A school improvement Steering Committee, appointed by district administration, is central to school improvement. This is the group that organizes and coordinates all school improvement activities. It is recommended that the Steering Committee have at least five members. The committee should represent stakeholders, and, in most districts, all buildings, but it should not be so large that it becomes unwieldy. Because the process is continuous, length of terms should be established and staggered. The Steering Committee Chair is clearly a key appointment.

The following is a recommended meeting schedule for the Steering Committee:

- The Committee should meet a minimum of once a month for the purpose of coordinating school improvement work.
- Monthly meeting dates should be established for the school year at the beginning of the school year.
- Special meetings may be called as needed by the chairperson.
- Minutes of the meetings should be forwarded to staff and Central Office.

This schedule should provide opportunity for continuous monitoring of progress and guidance to staff in designing and implementing school improvement strategies.

Step 2: Build Understanding and Commitment to the Purpose and Process of School Improvement

This component is essential for any improvement process. It will help to assure that all the stakeholders understand and believe in the importance of the process. It will include preliminary organizational activities, establishment of reasonable time lines, and setting up an organizational structure of committees that will insure broad involvement in the process. The staff and Board of Education should be provided information and the opportunity for discussion about school improvement and the broader school improvement process initially and throughout the improvement process.

This information and discussion should include the following:

- **Basic purpose.** The basic purpose of the Continuous Improvement Process is to conduct an on-going process for reviewing the educational performance and growth of students and, in those areas where performance is lower than expected or preferred, to institute a process of examining the reasons, setting improvement goals, identifying strategies aimed at improving the learning goal area, and verifying the performance gains.
- **Steps.** Explain the steps of the continuous improvement process and what they involve.
- **The Systemic Relationship.** Address the systemic relationship of each educational component within the school. This includes adherence to the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) as well as to the elements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB).
- **Time and Resources.** Determine the time and resources needed. The processes of collecting critical data elements, and determining or reviewing specific improvement strategies should be annual and continuous activities. When areas of need are identified, the goal setting, action planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation components are set in place. The timeline for interventions should be driven by the complexity of the change and not by external forces.
- **The Role and Importance.** Emphasize the role and importance of all participants in the improvement process. It is important for the administrative team and the Steering Committee to discuss and formally identify the roles of the participants in the development and implementation of the school improvement process. These participants include: administration, teachers, classified staff, students and student groups, school board, parents, and community representatives.

Step 3: Develop the Time Line

An overall time line will guide the continuous improvement process and help staff understand the flow of the entire process. The Steering Committee is responsible for establishing the time line, managing its implementation, and adjusting when needed. Although the process is continuous, the phases within the process should have endpoints, and each should be brought to closure, based upon the depth and complexity of the action plan.

The timeline for school improvement should include:

- Dates or time frames for committee work. (For example – the Data/Profile Committee, Goal Committees, etc.). The overall timeline may also include dates or time frames for related activities such as curriculum development, assessment planning, and professional development.
- Time frames for implementing and monitoring improvement strategies .
- Due dates for reports to the staff or school board
- Anticipated dates for external team visits.

Step 4: Create committee structures

The active involvement of all staff is the only way the school can build internal ownership of this process. The committee structures will vary according to the size and complexity of staff organization. In general, the continuous improvement process will have a sub-group of the staff responsible for the following tasks, although separate committees may not be needed:

- Steering Committee
- Profile or Data Committee
- Goal Action Plan Committees

With smaller staff sizes, the Steering Committee may be responsible for setting the goals and for documentation of the progress. The profile is often prepared by a separate committee made up of staff with expertise or interest in data and use of spreadsheet software (useful in creating the graphics used in the profile). Each goal/action plan committee is also generally comprised of teachers with interest/expertise in the goal area selected and those who may represent groups of students especially targeted for intervention in the goal area.

Step 5: Update the Mission

The Steering Committee should provide leadership in developing the school or district mission statement. Schools and districts vary in the approaches for doing this. At a minimum, school staff must have the opportunity to discuss and create a common understanding of the school's role and purpose to help students become productive, educated members of society.

The mission is a precise written statement that identifies the priorities and educational beliefs of the school or district with regard to what is to be developed within its students. A mission is a purpose that serves as a road map and guide for your school. Creating a school's mission statement is a process of gathering ideas and suggestions for the mission and honing them into a short, sharply focused phrase that meets specific criteria. Words should be chosen for their meaning rather than beauty, for clarity over cleverness. The best mission statements are plain speech with no educational jargon. A good mission statement is inspiring, clear, crisp, and concise. The true spirit of a mission statement is that it inspires stakeholders and provides a touchstone for all efforts.

Consider the following questions when developing a mission statement:

1. Why are we what we are?
2. What is the school's reason for being?
3. What is the school's main purpose?
4. What is the ideal outcome of the school's efforts?
5. What, in general terms, do we want for students academically and socially?
6. What is the staff's role in making the mission statement a reality in the school?
7. What will staff have to do to make the mission statement a reality?

Pull it together. Put the answers to the questions above together into one or two statements. This will be the first draft of your mission. (Don't spend a lot of time "word-smithing"). The content is more important at this point. The School Improvement Team and other staff will usually need to refine and polish the mission statement for later review by the entire staff.

CREATING THE PROFILE

The Profile – What and Why

The school profile is a document, either electronic or in print, that provides a concise collection of information about student performance, school and community demographics, school programs, and student and adult perceptions of the school and its programs. It should include a collection of clear charts and graphs with succinct summary statements that will aid in an analysis of progress and needs.

Step 1: Determine Data Sources

The goals of improvement are based upon the needs emerging from the data; therefore, it is important that districts are able to collect appropriate data efficiently, find ways to manage and display it so that all district staff are able to analyze, communicate and act upon it. This analysis, the communication, and subsequent actions are the heart of the continuous improvement process.

The data sources should include the following:

- Student performance data
- Demographic data
- Program data
- Perceptual data

Focusing Questions:

- What data sources are needed for the Continuous Improvement Process?
 - ✓ Which data does not need to be collected?
 - ✓ Are data sources being collected in multiple places?
 - ✓ In what form are the data?
 - ✓ Are the formats useable and clearly defined?
- What data are being collected by the district?
 - ✓ Who is collecting it?
 - ✓ How does the district know it is accurate?
 - ✓ When is it collected?
- How are the data being collected?

- ✓ Who has access to these data?
- How do we assure data are of quality and are protected?
- Who sees the data?
 - ✓ What is done with it?
 - ✓ How is it used?
 - ✓ Does everyone who needs to see it see it?
 - ✓ Does everyone who sees it understand it?
- How can multicultural education be incorporated?

Public school districts are required in Rule 10 (accreditation) to incorporate multicultural education in the school improvement process. Multicultural education has many aspects, but always includes a concern for equity. Equity can be examined through analysis of achievement patterns. Do these patterns suggest that disproportionate numbers of racial or ethnic minorities tend to be concentrated in certain classes or be minimally represented in others? Equity also includes concern for achievement. When class rankings, honor roll membership, ACT scores, and other indicators are examined through disaggregation, are some groups notable by their absence? Disaggregation allows a staff to see beneath the surface. If an overall dropout rate of less than 2 percent includes a rate of over 30 percent of a particular ethnic sub-group of students, what appears on the surface to be strength may actually appear to be a concern. This analysis and identification of equity needs should assist staff members in selecting and including strategies and activities to meet the needs of all students.

Step 2: Include Student Performance Data

It will be important to identify /consider student performance data to be included in the profile. This should include STARS data, criterion referenced data, norm referenced data, any other student performance data (see Chart in Appendix C).

Consider doing a trend analysis of specific grade levels. Trend data should consist of at least three years of data from the same measures or instruments and collected at a similar time of the school year. The following should be considered:

- The STARS data at grades 4, 8, and 11 are the most logical.
- The “border” grades at the elementary, middle school, and high school should also be considered.

- Whenever possible, enter the data into an electronic spreadsheet and create graph, charts, and/or table that best illustrate the trends noted.
- Use a comparative point whenever possible (state average, national data, etc.). In graphic representations, draw trend lines to show comparative groups (ex. State, district, school data for same data points).
- Review each graph and discuss the implications of the data. Refrain from making excuses for the data, over-rationalizing, and other efforts to mask the true nature of the data.
- Write clear brief statements that summarize the data.

Step 3: Consider Perceptual Data

Focusing Question: “What critical perceptual data should be included in the School Profile and who will be responsible for collecting it?”

While the focus of continuous school improvement is student performance, the work is also directed to the causal factors of that performance, to instructional, organizational, and management practices and decisions that directly or indirectly affect performance. Student performance is readily quantifiable through assessment, the results of which may be thought of as “hard” data. Many of the causal factors of that performance are identified with somewhat less precision because they lie in the area of school “climate,” and they are frequently evaluated or identified through surveys. What people believe to be true—opinion—is **perceptual data**. Because it is “soft” data, it is sometimes dismissed. It can, however, contribute significantly to the construction of the school profile and to the overall improvement process. A quality improvement plan should address both the causal factors of the learning and the performance data generated by the students. Some examples of perceptual data include climate surveys, parent surveys, staff surveys, student surveys, technology use surveys, etc. A sample chart is in Appendix D. Any examination of school climate, for example, will probably involve the Correlates of Effective Schools, and conclusions about the presence or absence of those elements will rest largely upon perceptions. Therefore, the Correlates of Effective Schools can help provide a system-wide look. (See Appendix B for a list of the Correlates and Appendix D for a chart to help select perceptual data.)

Step 4: Consider Program Data

Focusing Question: “What critical data about the programs and services of our school should be included in our School Profile and who will be responsible for collecting it?”

The school profile may also include information about instructional practices and patterns, organization, curricular and co-curricular programs, equity, safety, staffing, etc. See Appendix E

for an example chart for program data. Among data a school might gather in this category are the following:

- Instructional practice information—whole group/small group, individual/team, frequency of and purposes of writing, etc.
- Teacher professional preparation, experience, assignment patterns (number of periods per day, number of separate preparations, activity responsibilities), turnover rates, etc.
- Curriculum Information—What courses are offered and how many students are enrolled in the courses, are curriculum guides and standards aligned and current?

Step 5: Include Demographic Data

The demographic data can include numbers of students at each grade level, longitudinal enrollment trends, the number of males and females, current numbers and trend data of minority students, special education and Title I membership, etc. Demographic data can also include participation information, such as enrollment patterns in elective programs and participation in extracurricular activities. The school might wish to determine what percentage of students takes the core recommended by ACT, for example, or enroll in advanced and vocational classes. How many students take the “full load” as compared with those with two study halls each day? How do the performance patterns of those groups compare? Graduation rates may be included in student demographic data or in the instructional program section, but they need to be examined, as do attendance patterns, failure rates, discipline referrals and honor roll membership.

Step 6: Organize and Present Data

The following questions should be considered in determining how to organize and present the data:

- How should the data be displayed?
 - ✓ Can the displays be easily generated?
 - ✓ Does the district have all the displays of the data that it needs?
 - ✓ Does it have some that should be eliminated?
 - ✓ Where is it stored?
- Are there more efficient ways to collect, manage, and display the data?
 - ✓ Who can help the district with that?

- How are the results of the analysis shared and communicated within the district?
 - ✓ Do the appropriate individuals and stakeholders within the district have knowledge about the data and a role in the action plan related to the data?
- How are the data shared and understood outside the school district?
 - ✓ Are all the data that should be shared, clearly communicated to appropriate stakeholders?
- Are all data communicated appropriately with regard to confidentiality and privacy issues?

Step 7: Reflect on and Analyze Data

As a staff, review the data presented within the School Profile. Prior to presenting the data, discuss how the staff will approach the analysis process. Specifically, ask: ***What can we do with this data that will give us insight into areas for improving student performance? Within each data source, what are the most important questions the data should help answer in order for the school to identify specific school improvement goals?***

Focusing Question: “What does the data tell us about our strengths and challenges, especially as it relates to student achievement and programs/resources which support the learning?”

This phase of the process is centered on the idea that data becomes information only through conversation with the stakeholders involved in its creation. The reflection upon the data must engage these stakeholders in a guided process of review and analysis of strengths and concerns. The process suggested below serves only as a basic guideline. Additional assistance in data analysis can be provided by staff members of Educational Service Units and the Nebraska Department of Education.

Example Data Analysis Process:

1. Schedule a staff gathering to review the data. This session(s) should allow ample time for the data to be presented, discussed, and preliminary analysis statements created. (This is a hands-on process for staff to get into the data, to discuss it in small groups and to offer narrative statements of strengths and weaknesses of the school. There is no one organizational format to facilitate this. Small groups may want to meet over a specified amount of time and then bring their findings back to the large group. If a full professional development day is available, the group may be able to immerse itself in the data and complete the analysis in a single setting.)

2. Write Narrative Statements. Each small group should craft a non-evaluative, yet rather specific narrative statement reflecting the strengths and/or weaknesses noted within each data source. Graphic representation of the data is critical for both the review and explanation of the narrative statement.
3. Prioritize the Narrative Statements. Once all of the narrative statements have been created and discussed, carry out a process to prioritize the weaknesses to be considered. The priority rating is based upon the importance the data area has to the overall achievement levels of the school.
4. Create a Summation Report of the School Profile. Once the prioritizations are complete, a Summary Report section should be created for the School Profile, outlining the major findings and the priority challenges proposed to be addressed in the Continuous Improvement Model. This Summary Report should be organized in the same sequence as the original data is presented (perhaps student performance, demographic information, program data, and perceptual data).

Step 8: Check the Profile for Recommended Components

Focusing Question: “What are the critical phases of developing and maintaining an effective School Profile to guide the school in continuous improvement?”

The chart below can be used to review and determine the effectiveness with the School Profile process.

	Indicator of Effectiveness	Yes	No
1.	Data has been collected with the need identified and multiple data elements are collected per category		
2.	The data collected informs us how our students are performing on STARS, norm referenced tests, curriculum referenced tests, and classroom assessments.		
3.	The data collected informs us on how students are performing in programs to meet special needs (LEP, IEP, ILCD, Title I, etc.)		
4.	The school profile has data from different sources and from all four categories: student performance, demographics, programs, and perceptions.		
5.	The school profile shows emerging trends through the use of trend line data over time (recommended 3 years)		
6.	The school profile adequately disaggregates data to establish patterns.		
7.	Needs for school improvement are emerging from the school profile.		
8.	We have identified positive trends in our performance for celebration.		
9.	A method is in place to share our school profile with our community.		
10.	All stakeholder representatives have been involved in the school profile process.		
11.	Other:		

SETTING THE GOALS

Goal Setting: What and Why

In this activity the Steering Committee and staff analyze the data in the profile to determine areas of strength and areas of need and to determine priority areas of need that should be identified as improvement goals. These will serve as the targets for the remainder of the improvement process.

Step 1: Prioritize The Areas Of Need

Focusing Questions: “What are the major themes/topics emerging from the data? Which are strengths and which are challenges? How critical is each to the fulfillment of the school’s mission and to the overall continuous improvement process?”

Use this chart to assist you in summarizing and then prioritizing the potential goal areas that emerge from the narrative statements developed during the reflections and analysis.

Emerging Goals Worksheet

What Goal areas are emerging from the data results (narrative statements)? What are the *strengths* of your school? What are the *challenging* areas that school may need to work on? What are *most critical* to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning? Why are they important

Theme/Topic	Is it a Strength?	Is it a Challenge?	How Critical is it?	Why?

Once the challenges have been identified from the analysis, involve the staff in a process to prioritize them based upon:

- How crucial is the challenge is to the mission of the school?
- How severe is the challenge?

Step 2: Determine the School Improvement Goals

Focusing Question: “What are the specific school improvement goal most critical to the improvement of student achievement?”

Types of Goals. The goals generally fall into two categories: “improving student performance” and “improving learning opportunities”. The student performance goals focus specifically on closing a gap between current student performance and preferred performance levels. In recent years, this has been the most important category of goals to be addressed. Learning opportunity goals focus on efforts to improve the curriculum, programs, facilities, community involvement, and student services which ultimately impact student performance.

Student Performance Goals. These are goals intended to increase student achievement. At least one of the goals, and preferably more, should be student learning-centered. These goals should begin with “*All students*” and will be written in the active voice.

For example:

- All students will improve reading skills.
- All students will increase knowledge and skills in the use of computer technology.

The Steering Committee should guard against goals such as “Students will be provided a broad curriculum so they may prepare for successful adult careers.” Such goals are too vague for focusing improvement strategies. (Such language may more appropriately fit in the district’s mission statement.)

Learning Opportunity Goals. These are goals which improve or increase the opportunities or potential for improved learning. They are often goals for adults in the school. Learning opportunity goals could focus on updating curriculum, improving the climate, involving parents, improving facilities, etc.

Criteria for the Goal. When writing a student performance goal, consider the following:

- Use a complete sentence with *All students* as the subject of the statement.
- Write the goal in the active voice with a verb such as *will increase* the identified learning behavior.
- Identify the general learning area such as *comprehension in non-fiction reading*.

- Avoid educational jargon.
- The goal should be measurable, without specifically identifying the measures to be used nor the expected level of improvement.
- Do not include the strategies or interventions to attain the goal.

When writing a learning opportunity goal statement, consider the following:

- The goal should be at least indirectly related to the improvement of student learning.
- Avoid educational jargon.
- Target dates of completion may be included.

Defining The “Essence” Of A Goal

Determining evidence of success often depends upon defining the essence, or meaning or intent of the goal. For example, if a goal targets student “responsibility,” care must be taken to insure that everyone agrees on the meaning of the term. To some, it may mean that students remain obedient and attentive in class. To others it may be embodied in homework completion, regular attendance, or a reduction in discipline referrals. Yet to others it may mean the exercise of initiative and personal management or the consideration of the social impact of our actions. While it is true that such affective goals are probably subject to wider interpretations than are cognitive ones, some care needs to be taken to assure that the intended improvement is clear and acceptable to all staff. Even cognitive goals may be subject to interpretations. If a steering committee selects this goal: “All students will improve skills in written communication in all curriculum areas,” what do they wish to be the outcome, the evidence of success? Will spelling improve? Will students write more fluent, longer pieces? Will technical writing improve? The goal statement that tries to incorporate all these outcomes will be too awkward, but there needs to be broad understanding of what “skills in written communication” means.

Relating of Goals to Time Line

In a continuous improvement process, the length of time anticipated for an improvement goal will vary depending upon the complexity and intricacy of the anticipated change. The time line for implementation is not based upon an externally structured schedule of months or years. It is based upon the amount of time the CIP Team feels is necessary to complete the design, implementation, monitoring, and successful integration of the change.

Step 3: Research Effective Practices

Focusing Question: “What has research shown to be effective strategies/interventions to impact our school improvement goal?”

The overview below should guide the staff’s process of conducting research on school practices related to your improvement goal. The worksheet in Appendix F may help to organize the research findings as the process moves forward.

Why should we go to the effort to research these promising school practices?

- It advances our learning of what works in a variety of schools facing the same or similar challenges. This creates a certain degree of efficiency in the improvement process.
- It reduces the temptation to jump quickly to the strategy or intervention without studying the broader landscape of practices.
- It is a requirement under the No Child Left Behind federal legislation, especially for schools seeking federal funding (i.e. Title I).

How might we conduct the research review?

- Assure that the team doing the review fully understands the essence of the school improvement goal being addressed.
- Disaggregate the supporting data for the goal to assure that the school has identified any critical groups or conditions contributing to the achievement gap.
- Identify sources for the research. Generally, they might include:
 - ✓NDE Toolkit (www.nde.state.ne.us/ciptoolkit)
 - ✓Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers
 - ✓ERIC
 - ✓Equity Assistance Centers
 - ✓Foreign Language Equity Centers
 - ✓National Research and Development Centers
 - ✓Regional Education Labs (e.g. MCREL)
 - ✓Regional Resource and Federal Centers Network for Special Education
 - ✓Technology Innovation Challenge Centers
 - ✓Vocational and Adult Education
 - ✓General WWW searches (via search engines)
- Assign study teams various research areas and/or sources.
- Utilize some type of information collection form that is consistent with all study teams.

PLANNING TO IMPROVE

Improvement Planning – What and Why:

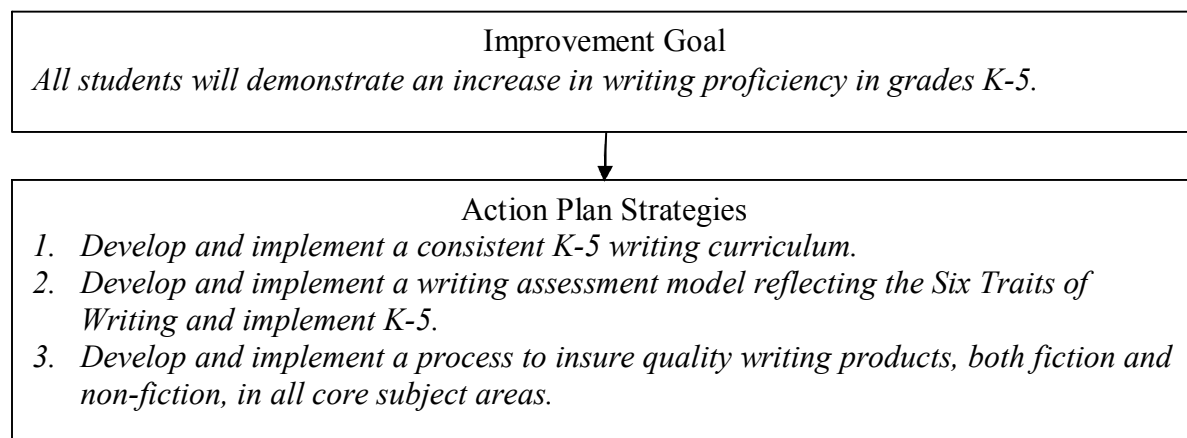
The action plan for improvement serves as the guide for all staff in implementing strategies to achieve a goal. It will direct each staff member over a period of one to three years and should help all staff implement strategies to improve student learning.

Step 1: Develop Action Plan Strategies

Focusing Question: “What specific objectives must be accomplished in order to have this Action Plan be successful?”

To accomplish your school improvement goal, you may have one or many action plans. A single improvement goal may have several related action plans, each focused on a specific strategy/intervention, or a specific group of students. Each action plan may have one or more objectives associated with it, but will generally have multiple strategies or activities. When creating an action plan, it is critical to make it as detailed and specific as possible, specifying who will do what, by when, and the resources needed. Finally, you must have a monitoring component.

Below is an example of how the action plan relates to the improvement goal.



Step 2: Reflect on Strategies and Interventions

Focusing Question: “What must we consider as we prepare, plan, and implement the strategies and interventions identified to meet our school improvement goal?”

Action plan committees and the Steering Committee should reflect upon the selected strategies and identify or recommend support activities that will help all staff implement the strategies. This will often include staff development activities (especially professional learning teams) to study and determine how strategies can best be implemented.

Step 3: Write the Action Plan

Focusing Question: “What must we do to successfully implement the strategies and interventions identified to meet our school improvement goal?”

The Action Plan will identify the specific activities to be undertaken, who will be responsible to assure that they are completed in a quality and timely manner, the resources needed, the target dates for completion, professional development needs, and when and how the progress will be measured and evaluated.

The initial action plan will provide a starting point in action, but it should be emphasized that as the school moves into its implementation, revisions to the action plan are encouraged to assure effective implementation. Refer to the action plan often as the process is implemented, and schedule a time, at least once each year, to review progress and make needed adjustments.

Step 4: Establish Baseline/Post-Intervention Evaluation Data

Focusing Question: “What data sources will we use as critical evidence that learning is improving because of our plan?”

This process is critical to the action planning process. The school must decide which data sources (preferably three different sources) most accurately describe the current level of student achievement related to the improvement goal. The data collected from these sources prior to the implementation of the action plan will serve as the *baseline data*. These same data sources will be used to monitor the progress during the implementation and then as the *post-intervention data* to make a summative evaluation of the improvement plan. To insure comparable measurements of performance, school staff should administer the same assessment instruments and processes at the same time of the year.

	NAME OF SCHOOL HERE				
School Improvement Goal #:					
Support Data (Three sources used to select the goal) 1. 2. 3.	Baseline/Post-Intervention Measures <i>Norm-Referenced Assessments</i>		Baseline/Post-Intervention Measures <i>Non Norm-Referenced Assessments</i>		
Strategy/Intervention: Objective: (optional)			Research Supporting This Intervention		
Activities to Implement the Strategy/Intervention	Person(s) Accountable	Timeline Beg End		Resources	Staff Development Outcome
↓Consider using the topics below in identifying action areas: 1. <i>Learners</i> 2. <i>Curriculum</i> 3. <i>Teachers</i> 4. <i>Classroom</i>					

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Implementation – What and Why:

This includes the entire set of significant actions by all staff over a period of one or more years that will bring about improved student performance. The implementation should be monitored closely by designated staff or committees to provide assistance and support as needed, in implementation of the plan.

Step 1: Help all Staff Develop an Understanding of the Goals and Strategies

Focusing Question: “What types of staff development and monitoring activities will help all staff effectively implement the plan?”

Planning is motivating, implementation can be challenging. Causing change is a complex process. It often takes more time than anticipated. It requires that those being asked to implement the change have a clear understanding of its purpose, the resources to be successful, and clear evidence of successful changes.

Step 2: Monitor the Implementation

Focusing Question: “Are the interventions being implemented in a timely manner and on course to achieve the results we desire?”

The monitoring phase focuses on formative evaluation. It occurs as the interventions or strategies are being implemented. It involves a check or series of checks to monitor two critical areas:

1. Implementation of each action within the action plan.
2. Assessment and/or perception data used by the action plan or goal committee as feedback to pinpoint what is working and areas that are not progressing.

The data that is collected during the monitoring phase should align with the four areas of data included in the School Profile (Performance, Program, Perceptions, Demographics). The data collected may be added to the School Profile as it is collected.

The action plan committee and/or the Steering Committee should determine how effectively the Action Plan is being implemented. Questions to consider might include:

1. **Targeted population.** Is the target group of students identified in the action plan actually being served?

2. **Interventions.** Are the interventions being implemented as recommended and planned? To what degree are staff carrying out their roles in the implementation?
3. **Timeframe.** Are interventions implemented when outlined in the Action Plan? When necessary, are time lines adjusted to assure better implementation?
4. **Actions.** Are the actions included in the action plan being implemented in the way that was specified in the plan?
5. **Responsibilities.** Are those who have a role in taking action doing their part to successfully accomplish the Action Plan?
6. **Monitoring.** Are collection and review of the evidence of completion of actions and feedback taking place as specified in the plan?
7. **Resources.** Are the human, technology, and financial resources being deployed as needed and specified in the Action Plan?

Step 3: Determine Effectiveness of the Interventions

Focusing Question: “To what extent have interventions contributed to changes in improved student performance in our school?”

The collecting and analyzing of critical data requires a systematic approach to determining the results of improvement efforts and using the results as the new baseline for continuous school improvement.

- Compare the baseline/post-intervention data results.
- Display performance data in graphic format with concise narrative descriptions.
- Share student performance results with all stakeholders and document key factors learned by the staff.

Step 4: Recognize progress, affirm successes

Formal and/or informal actions or events should be included in school improvement planning so that all stakeholders recognize progress and see the results of their actions. This will increase awareness and understanding of effective practices and provide encouragement and support for staff and student accomplishments.

APPENDIX

- A. Accrediting Agency Requirements
- B. Effective Schools Correlates
- C. Planning for Student Performance Data
- D. Selecting Perceptual Data for the School Profile
- E. Selecting Program Data for the School Profile
- F. Sample Worksheet for Researching School Improvement Strategies

ACCREDITING AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

One accreditation requirement of both the Nebraska Department of Education and of the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCACASI) is that schools engage in a school improvement process. The models and processes recommended by each agency share many of the same features. The requirements of this accrediting agency are shown below.

NEBRASKA ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Rule 10, Regulations and Procedures for the Accreditation of Schools, includes the following statements regarding school improvement. Items 009.01A through 009.01B are requirements of all Nebraska public schools and accredited nonpublic schools.

009 School Improvement.

009.01 Quality Indicator: A systematic on-going process guides planning, implementation, and evaluation and renewal of school improvement activities to meet local and statewide goals and priorities. The school improvement process focuses on improving student learning. The process includes a periodic review by visiting educators who provide consultation to the local school/community in continued accomplishment of plans and goals.

009.01A The school system develops and implements a school improvement process to promote quality learning for all students. This process includes procedures and strategies to address quality learning, equity, and accountability. In public schools, the process incorporates multicultural education as described in 004.01G. In all school systems, the school improvement process includes the following activities at least once within each five years.

009.01A1 Review and update of a mission or vision statement.

009.01A2 Collection and analysis of data about student performance, demographics, learning climate, and former high school students.

009.01A3 Selection of improvement goals. At least one goal is directed toward improving student performance.

009.01A4 Development and implementation of a plan which includes procedures, strategies, or actions to achieve goals.

009.01A5 Evaluation of progress toward improvement goals.

009.01B The school improvement process includes a visitation by a team of external representatives to review progress and provide written recommendations.

A copy of the written recommendations is provided to the Department. The external team visits are conducted at least once each five years.

NEBRASKA REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOLS HAVING A LOW STUDENT PERFORMANCE RATING ON THE STATE OF THE SCHOOLS REPORT

005.04 Student Performance Rating. Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, school districts having a low student performance rating on the Nebraska academic content standards for reading or mathematics develop and implement plans to increase student performance. A rating of “Unacceptable” or “Needs Improvement” is considered a low student performance rating. The rating is determined by the Commissioner or his or her designee pursuant to the criteria and rating chart in Appendix H of this Chapter and reported by the Commissioner in an annual Nebraska State of the Schools Report.

005.04A By the February 1 following the annual Nebraska State of the Schools Report, such school districts submit to the Department a plan to improve student performance in grades having a low rating in reading or mathematics. The plan includes the components in Appendix I and is designed to achieve the next higher rating within three years.

005.04A1 Such school districts annually submit to the Department by February 1 a written report of progress in implementation of the improvement plan and in improving learning in the areas receiving a low rating.

005.04B On or before June 30 of the third school year after receipt of the initial low rating, the district documents an increase in the percentage of students achieving state standards in each subject area and grade having the low rating sufficient to reach the next higher rating. Districts not reaching the next higher rating are in violation of Rule 10 unless the district applies for and receives an extension from the Board pursuant to the procedures in Appendix J. The district may also apply for permission to use an alternative option for documenting improved student learning during the period of the extension pursuant to the procedures in Appendix J.

Note: Appendices H, I, and J referenced above may be found in a copy of Rule 10 (or on the NDE website at: <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/LEGAL/RULE10.html>.) These appendices provide specific procedures for the school improvement planning in schools having a low student performance rating on the Nebraska State of the Schools Report.

NORTH CENTRAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT REQUIREMENTS

The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCACASI) a regional accreditation agency, requires that schools be involved in an improvement process that includes the following:

- Meeting the Strategic Planning Criteria (section SP) of the NCA CASI Standard and Criteria
- Selecting goals based on an analysis of local assessment data and other information
- Focusing on goals to improve student performance
- Implementing an improvement plan that includes strategies and a staff development plan
- Preparing a Documentation Report showing progress in achieving the goals
- Hosting a Quality Assurance Review (External Team Visit) at least once each five years.

NCA schools may use the *Nebraska Framework for School Improvement* as their school improvement guide. Additional information is available at:

<http://www.nde.state.ne.us/NCA/NCA/html> and the Commission web site:
<http://www.ncacasi.org>.

EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS CORRELATES

1. Clear School Mission – Staff shares an understanding of and commitment to the goals, priorities, procedures, and accountability of the school. Staff accepts responsibility for students' learning.
2. High Expectations for Success – Staff believes and demonstrates that all students can attain mastery of the essential content and skills.
3. Instructional Leadership – The principal is an instructional leader, effectively communicating to the public, students and staff the central mission of the school and managing the instructional program to achieve maximum effectiveness.
4. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress – A variety of assessment procedures are used frequently, and the results of assessment are used to improve individual student performance and the instructional program.
5. Opportunity to Learn and time on Task – Teachers allocate a significant amount of classroom time to teacher-directed, planned learning activities in the essential content and skills.
6. Safe and Orderly Environment – The school climate is not oppressive, but is orderly, purposeful, businesslike, and free from the threat of physical harm.
7. Home-School Relations – Parents understand and support the school's mission and play an important role in helping achieve it.

PLANNING FOR STUDENT PERFORMANCE DATA

Data Source	Students Assessed	When Assessed	Data Format
<i>Ex. Norm-Referenced Test – Language Arts</i>	<i>Gr. 3,4,5</i>	<i>February</i>	<i>Percentile Scores</i>
<i>Statewide Writing Scores</i>	<i>Gr. 4</i>	<i>January</i>	<i>Percent Proficient</i>
<i>District Writing Assessment</i>	<i>Gr. 3 and 5</i>	<i>March</i>	<i>Percent Proficient on local rubric</i>

SELECTING PERCEPTUAL DATA FOR THE SCHOOL PROFILE

You may use this chart to identify perceptual data to be collected, how the data will inform you, and who is responsible for collecting it as part of the developing and maintaining the School Profile.

Category of Data	What do we want the data to tell us?	Who is responsible for getting the data?	What, if any, additional data should we collect in this area?
Climate Surveys			
Parent Surveys			
Staff Surveys			
Student Surveys			
Graduate and Transition Surveys			
Technology Surveys			
Other Locally Administered Surveys			

SELECTING PROGRAM DATA FOR THE SCHOOL PROFILE

You may use this chart to identify program data to be collected, why it will be useful, and who is responsible for collecting it.

Category	What do we want the data to tell us?	Who is responsible for getting the data?	What, if any, additional data should we collect in this area?
Discipline Data			
Community Data			
Parent Involvement (Conf. etc.)			
Academic Programs			
Extra Curricular Programs			
Student Support Programs			
Professional Development			
Course Offerings			
Other			

SAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR RESEARCHING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

Use this worksheet to investigate and document effective strategies/interventions, practices, and possibly related activities that may support your school improvement goal.

Goal Statement:

School Experiences/Site Visitation: *What have other schools with similar demographics done to address this goal? Is a site- visit possible or appropriate?*

Research Summary: *In this goal area, what does the research say are successful and effective practices?*

Strategies/Interventions: *Based upon this study process, what are 3-5 strategies/ interventions the study team would recommend to improve in this goal area?*